

Snooping Among the Snoopers

Congress will shortly decide how and when it is going to investigate the Central Intelligence Agency. When it does so the perennial question of whether a select congressional watchdog committee should be permitted to kibitz upon the activities of the superspy organization will doubtless arise again.

A good case can be made for some such scrutiny. Much depends upon the extent of detailed briefing that may be demanded of the CIA by the legislators. And upon the kind of self-imposed restrictions which the Congress would place on its watchdog members for security reasons.

Congressmen are not notably reticent, and many international plans involving protection of sources require absolute secrecy. On the other hand, post mortems of the Cuban fiasco indicate that behind-the-scenes advice by Senator Fulbright, had it been heeded, could have prevented the CIA's most noted operational blunder.

A watchdog is needed. But the breed required is one that barks covertly at the administration in power, not openly to all the world.

Beyond this there are several serious problems arising out of the Cuban affair that merit closed-door congressional scrutiny. If a joint House-Senate foreign affairs committee does gain legislative permission to sit as a permanent supervisor over intelligence activities, it should co-operate with the executive branch in (1) eliminating overstaffing and duplication among the nearly twenty intelligence organs of the government, and (2)

examining the efficiency of the CIA's executive machinery.

Editorial Research Reports asserts in a study of the CIA that "the agency grew to two or three times the size of the State Department during Allen Dulles's tenure." Annual expenditures are presumed to be about a billion dollars. Senator Henry Jackson, in summing up the work of his valuable national security committee, observes that "there is serious overstaffing in the national security departments and agencies."

Some reorganization and simplification of the CIA has apparently taken place as a result of the Robert Kennedy and General Maxwell Taylor probings after the Cuban bungle. Paramilitary cloak-and-dagger work has been placed under Pentagon planners.

But the question is still raised in some quarters as to whether there is enough direct executive control over some CIA activities, particularly in the uncommitted trouble spots of the world. Should the new CIA chief, John McCone, leave actual operational control to his deputy while limiting himself to broader policy co-ordination—as some outside observers speculate he may—a skilled deputy who reports often and in detail will be called for.

On the whole the CIA has apparently done a superb job of keeping its eye on the opposition slugger—the Soviet Union. But Congress and the White House would be justified in expecting better performance against dangerous bunters in other lands.